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From: Patricia S. Ploehn, LCSW, Director
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DCFS-CSSD COLLABORATION EFFORTS AND TRACKING SYSTEM

On July 18, 2006, your Board instructed the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and County Counsel, in coordination with the Child Support Services Department (CSSD), to analyze the circumstances surrounding the highly publicized "Melinda P." case and to develop a comprehensive plan that would foster a stronger partnership and collaboration between the Departments. CSSD and DCFS were also charged with working with County Counsel to develop a tracking system to identify non-custodial parents paying child support as a way to reunify children with the non-custodial parent(s) at the children's point of entry into the foster care system.

The circumstances regarding Melinda's placement have been examined internally by both departments; and the findings were previously submitted to your Board. This report summarizes the collaborative work commenced between the departments, outlines the DCFS-CSSD tracking system currently being refined, and exhibits the departments' compliance with the Board's requests for improving the delivery of services for constituents within their joint caseloads.

I. CSSD-DCFS Collaborative Action Plan

Action	Target Date	Status
1. Identify a planning team drawn from representatives of targeted child support and child welfare offices to lead the implementation of the new referral criteria and the development of training for child welfare workers on child support and the new referral criteria.	August 2006	Completed. DCFS selected the <i>Linkages</i> pilot offices (Torrance, North Hollywood, and Metro North) due to the overlap in child welfare, child support, and public assistance caseloads.
2. Convene planning team to clarify referral criteria and develop a relevant training program.	August 2006	Completed.
3. Collect baseline information on referral activity and the appropriateness of referrals for a sample of cases in offices targeted for training.	August 2006	Completed.
4. Create a list of liaisons for child support and child welfare workers so that workers have a point person they can contact in each geographical area.	September 2006	Completed.
5. Review best practices of local child welfare and support agencies in California.	September 2006	Completed.
6. Investigate best practices in other California counties.	September 2006	Completed.
7. Examine current referral process between DCFS and CSSD for necessary and/or appropriate modification.	September to October 2006	Ongoing. Initial examination of the referral process has been completed; however, this remains an ongoing task as modifications are required with the implementation of the pilot procedures.
8. Conduct the training program.	October 2006 to January 2007	Ongoing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial training for managers conducted on October 16, 2006. • Initial joint training for line staff completed at DCFS Torrance office on December 5, 2006. • North Hollywood and Metro North staff to be trained: January 2007.
9. Define the specific duties of staff designated as liaisons.	December 2006	Ongoing. Draft of liaison duties completed.

10. Assess post-training patterns of referral and appropriateness.	December 2006 to March 2007	Pending 10 percent audit sampling procedures developed for implementation in three pilot DCFS offices beginning in December 2006.
11. Expand access of CSSD's child support case management system (ACES Replacement System (ARS)).	December 2006 to March 2007	Ongoing. ARS will be installed at the DCFS Torrance office December 2006.
12. Convene joint CSSD-DCFS Blue Ribbon Summit.	March 2007	Pending.
13. Roll-out of developed best practices to non-pilot DCFS offices.	April 2007 to December 2007	Pending.

II. Other collaborative efforts between DCFS and other County Departments

DCFS has worked both formally and informally with various County agencies throughout the life of a child welfare services case. In the initial investigative phase of a referral regarding child abuse and neglect, DCFS staff utilizes information from the DPSS system to locate the addresses of parents and children who may be receiving DPSS services. With the advent of the DCFS-CSSD collaborative efforts, DCFS has been able to use CSSD's ARS to conduct more extensive parent finding efforts through due diligence searches both at the initial point of entry and in the later stages of a case.

DCFS social workers also obtain assistance from Department of Health Services Public Health Nurses (PHNs). PHNs assist during both the initial investigation and ongoing services phases of a case to provide assessments of a child's health and medical risk. In addition, with the implementation of Team Decision Making (TDM) meetings, the Department has formalized increased participation by relevant staff from other departments, such as the Department of Mental Health (DMH). These meetings occur at key decision making points in the life of a case, including the decision to detain and place a child, which would be one of the first opportunities available to utilize the expertise of DMH or other departments. However, there are laws and regulations (including those under the Health Insurance Portability Accountability Act) protecting the confidentiality of DCFS and patient case records that would limit the departments' abilities to fully utilize the corresponding department's records. Under current legislation, accessing client records requires a waiver, often from the very parent that the DCFS social worker is attempting to locate. Legislative relief will be explored, along with further avenues for improved communication and information sharing.

III. DCFS-CSSD Tracking System

Following your Board's motions of July 18th, DCFS and CSSD executive and information technology staff have revisited the existing tracking system of CWS/CMS and ARS for solutions to technical issues and possible system incompatibilities. The departments have examined the information exchanged

through electronic interface and the manner in which the information is and can be used by each department to locate parents, establish orders and terminate support upon changes in circumstances. Refinements of the existing system to identify the parents of children at the point of their entry into the child welfare system are underway.

Since 2004, CSSD and DCFS have had the capability of electronically exchanging data from their case management systems. In fact, DCFS electronically refers all cases requiring child support enforcement to CSSD, alleviating the necessity for paper referrals. CSSD in exchange sends DCFS information concerning both the demographics of the DCFS case participants and the financial payment records of the non-custodial parents referred. This information is updated by CSSD and provided to DCFS on a daily basis.

CSSD and DCFS information technology staff have been working towards additional automated matching efforts. CSSD has offered to match the entire DCFS database against CSSD's case management system to locate parents of children in the child welfare system. The initial exchange of data has begun. A report of the matches found is scheduled to be provided to DCFS later this month.

In addition to the electronic data match, CSSD has provided DCFS with real time access to its case management system, the ARS. On September 29, 2006, DCFS notified all staff that Parent Locator clerks, previously out-stationed at CSSD's Commerce campus, are now housed at Edmund Edelman's Children's Court, and provided updated procedures on how to obtain extensive search results. CSSD has further offered to expand ARS access to designated staff in all DCFS regional offices. The first installation of the ARS software will take place this month in the Torrance regional office, one of the three *Linkages* pilot offices. The remaining two pilot offices will receive ARS in January, with subsequent roll-out to other DCFS offices. It is expected that ARS access will produce more timely and comprehensive searches at the beginning of a case for improved matching of children with their non-custodial parents. Furthermore, DCFS is currently updating its due diligence policy to ensure that search procedures incorporate updated technology and current information.

The electronic and manual tracking systems currently in place and envisioned will allow for the immediate location of available information concerning parents of foster care youth, both at the point of entry into the system and throughout the existence of a child welfare case.

PP:PB:JA:AG:mg

c: Chief Administrative Officer
County Counsel